



Heart & soul

Cate Mackenzie, couples and relationship coach, helps readers **open their hearts to relationships they never thought possible**

Reboot your relationship

This month, Cate shows you how to let down your defences and rekindle that loving feeling

Everything around us needs a little maintenance from time to time – your car, your home, even your love life.

But whereas your car might start spluttering or the roof of your house might spring a leak, it's not always so obvious when your relationship is in need of some TLC.

On the surface at least, many people appear to have happy relationships. They have good jobs, a lovely home and wonderful children, but there can be an underlying problem – they just don't connect romantically with each other any more.

They've trundled along, working hard, caring for their kids, being busy, but over time they've stopped communicating their deepest feelings to each other. They've stopped being romantic. Still, this doesn't mean the spark has

gone from their relationship. It just needs to be reignited.

When we meet a new partner, we connect from our true essences, where we are present, open and naturally engaged, allowing us to love and woo each other. But as time goes by in a relationship, we can often build up our defences and put on what relationship coach Hedy Schleifer calls our 'survival suit', where we react to life as we did as children when we had to defend ourselves from the world.

These defences can reveal themselves as distractions, such as always working on the computer or watching TV, or you may find yourself constantly criticising your partner rather than encouraging them. This is a way of avoiding your true feelings, instead of being present and vulnerable with each other, like you were at the very beginning of your courtship.

But avoiding or attacking each other creates more distance, until you end up wondering what was there in the first place. In order to rediscover that spark, you need to connect again.

When you started dating, you most likely spent lots of time doing new, different and interesting

things. You'd look into each other's eyes, hold hands and ask probing questions to get to know each other. You need to recreate the magic of those early days.

Consider going on day trips or weekends away, and start asking each other about your hopes and dreams for the future.

We can easily assume we know everything about our partner and think there is no point in trying new things or asking them deep and meaningful questions. But as soon as you treat your partner as if they're a brand-new person and try to get to know them, you might be amazed by what you discover and how the romantic connection between you grows stronger.

Rediscover your passion

Arrange weekly surprising dates. Take it in turns to find an interesting location then ask your partner to meet you there, as if you're on a date. Dress up, flirt, compliment them and reconnect.

Send love notes and texts.

Psychologist John Gottman, who is known for his work on marital stability, suggests you should have at least five positive interactions

for every negative one. He says the ratio for truly flourishing couples is about 20 to one!

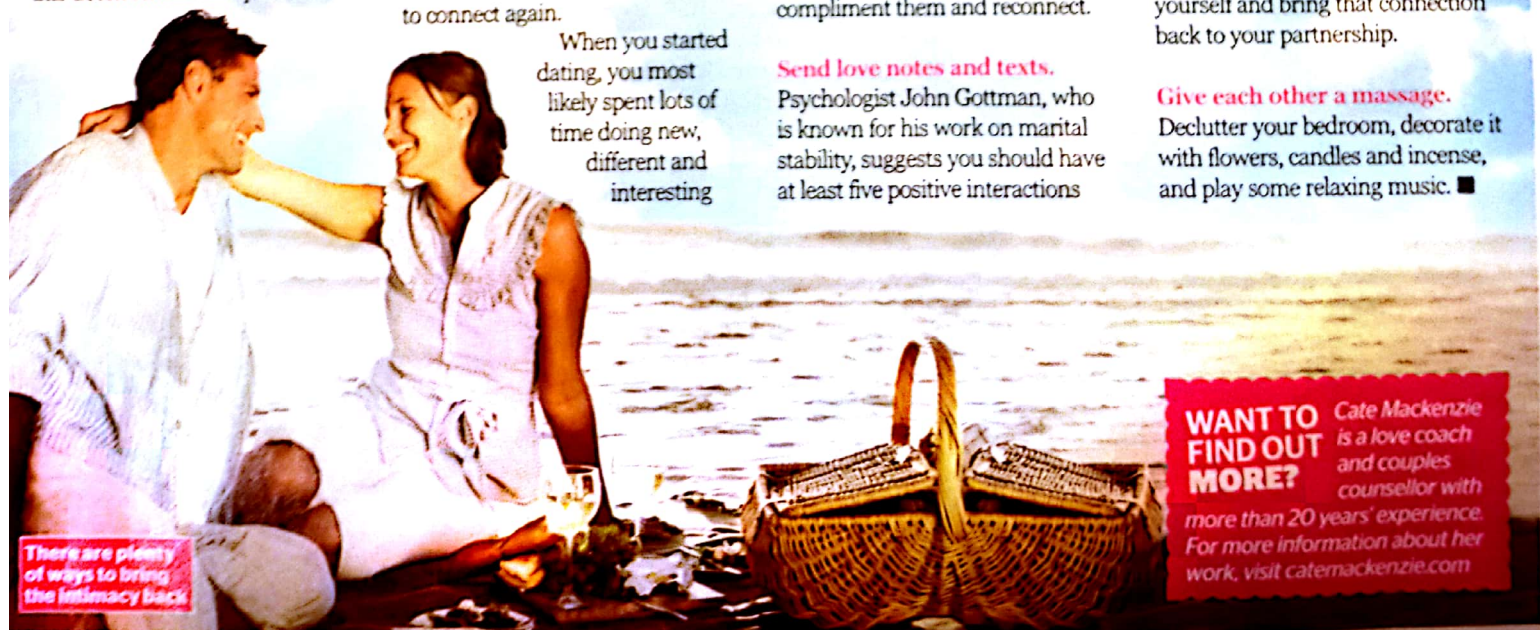
Invite your partner to dinner, and talk. Ask them what they want from the relationship and where they see it going, what they feel they bring to it and what they think would reignite the love.

Also ask them what they find difficult about the relationship, and discuss how you can help each other. Really listen to them and tell them how much you have missed connecting with them like this.

Each night, spend at least five minutes looking into each other's eyes. Sit opposite each other and slowly breathe in and out, letting your breath rise from your belly and grow through your body. In your mind, appreciate that you have a lovely partner who is willing to share this life with you. Remember all the beautiful things you've done together. As you look into their eyes, imagine breathing love in and breathing love out.

Treat yourself. Enjoying time with friends or indulging in a spa day will help you connect with yourself and bring that connection back to your partnership.

Give each other a massage. Declutter your bedroom, decorate it with flowers, candles and incense, and play some relaxing music. ■



There are plenty of ways to bring the intimacy back

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE? Cate Mackenzie is a love coach and couples counsellor with more than 20 years' experience. For more information about her work, visit catemackenzie.com